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Unlocking Potential Staff Development at Deschutes Public Library District

by Michael Gaston

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If you can imagine it, you can do it. That old axiom takes on a new meaning in this sea of changing technology that we call the information age. But the rapid gains in technological capability will have no direct benefit to our clients at Deschutes Public Library unless we have the vision to perceive the possibilities and opportunities made available by lighting fast bandwidth and CPUs.

In a nutshell, we perceive that the key to library evolution, in this period of rapid change, is staff development.

Staff Development Goals

The purpose of our staff development program is to unlock the potential of our employees, and then focus all that energy and creativity upon the mission, goals, and objectives of our library system. To that end, we are seeking to develop a corporate culture with the following characteristics:

- Each staff member understands and "owns" the mission, goals, objectives, and structure of the library system.
- Each staff member has mastered the knowledge, skills, and techniques relevant to his/her area of responsibility.
- Each staff member understands the significance and importance of his/her duties in the context of the "bigger picture."
- Each professional and management level staff member is aware of regional and national developments relevant to his/her assigned duties, and is engaged in an ongoing review of local operations.
- Each staff member actively shares information with fellow employees.

Getting There

The Deschutes Public Library System has only just begun to develop the comprehensive staff development system that will be necessary to achieve the type of program described above. Our first steps include the following strategies:

1. **Hire good staff.** We shoot for the best. We look for candidates for professional positions who have demonstrated an ability to innovate, and who have been community/professional leaders. We offer a competitive salary, and we make a commitment to support professional involvement.
2. **Supervise/evaluate in context of the mission, goals, and objectives.** Every department is developing goals and objectives in the context of our mission. Each department manager will meet with individual staff members to develop personal goals that fit within this structure. Biweekly meetings will be held with individual staff members to track progress.
3. **Reduce bureaucracy.** We are working to eliminate unnecessary rules. We want to create a more relaxed environment that conveys that performance is the bottom line.
4. **Encourage peer contacts by management and professional staff.** Management and professional staff are encouraged to "get out of the building." Staff are encouraged to join committees, visit similar systems, and attend conferences. Each management and professional staff member is assigned a personal travel budget.
5. **Encourage department level training.** Each department is assigned a budget for training, which can be used for internal or external workshops.
6. **Encourage communication across department boundaries.** Every staff member has an email address, and every department is in the process of developing new applications on our Intranet. Every employee attends the annual "Staff Day" team building and training program. Ongoing internal training is designed to cut across departments and branches.

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Bob McWhorter, Network Administrator.

Professional Development

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What Librarians and Library Administrators Can Do

1. Budget for support staff development.
2. Encourage and motivate your staff to expand their professional views.
3. Provide new training opportunities for those who are interested.
4. Assist support staff who want to participate in organizations like OLA/SSD.
5. Provide opportunities for support staff who have attended professional development to "give back" to

their peers through brown bag lunches or in other creative ways.

6. Reward those who show initiative. Think about how you treat staff who are challenging the boundaries of support staff/librarians.
7. Evaluate how you recognize your staff—both librarians and support staff.
8. Remember, support staff are professionals too! **Q**

Unlocking Potential

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Bend Public Library

It's Not Easy and It's Not Cheap

"No pain, no gain" is another old axiom that seems apropos to an aggressive staff development program. To date, we have encountered the following challenges:

- Meetings, conferences, and field trips impact scheduling, and can compete with direct service to our clients. For instance, it's clear that we will have to increase the budget for substitutes in the reference department.
- Transitioning to a goal-directed organization that encourages creativity and innovation can be difficult for some management styles. It's a lot easier to just tell someone what to do!
- Communication takes both time and commitment.

If You Can Imagine It, You Can Do It

We have all seen great library programs that lack adequate funding, and we have seen well funded library

programs that are missing some critical ingredient. Funding doesn't seem to be the primary problem. I am convinced that the critical component is an ongoing commitment to development and innovation.

I am concerned that the library landscape is changing much too rapidly for any library to simply embrace yesterday's approach to our profession... or even today's approach. I believe that the institutions that will do best in the coming years are those that seek change, rather than those that react to change.

At Deschutes Public Library we are convinced that the best method to anticipate and adapt to this changing world of technology is through staff development. We are convinced that, now more than ever, a library is only as good as its staff.

Providing the necessary level of staff support is much more than a fringe benefit, it is the heart of library development in these turbulent times. **Q**